

Seven Non-Clinical Essentials For Sustainable Dental Practice Success

BY FRAN PANGAKIS & SHARI TASTAD

You've heard the expression: Knowledge is power. But is it really? Yes and no. By itself, knowledge is not power. It depends on how and when knowledge is applied and **who** applies it.

How often does a dentist make changes to the systems in the office, believing this is the way to solve problems? Doctors spend a lot of time and money updating and implementing their office systems, then sit back and wait for things to change.

Do they? Probably not. Because the issue that needs to be changed, more often than not, is the **attitude** of the people who are expected to use the system. Systems are only as good as the resourcefulness, creativity, and commitment of the people who use them.

Let's take an in-depth look at the foundational components that are hallmarks of the successful dental practice:



1 SHARED VISION/SHARED VALUES

Shared Vision:

Do you have a vision for your work life? If so, is it old, or have you exceeded or outgrown your original vision and need to update it to demonstrate your current situation and where you want to be heading?

Questions to ask to ensure your vision statement is clear and up-to-date:

- Is it **your** vision statement or has it been hijacked by someone else?
- Do you feel you have no control over the direction you are heading and are simply following along behind your team and their visions and values?
- Do you believe you can choose to be the master of your vision?
- Do the people who surround you share your vision with a positive attitude? Is everyone clear about where you are heading and why?

Shared Values:

People communicate with different styles. Common, shared values keep every relationship on track.

Questions to ask to ensure values are clearly defined.

- Do the people with whom you work have the same values?
- Do they respect and acknowledge the values you hold dear?

Values clarification exercise

Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*, *Built to Last*, and *How the Mighty Fall*, believes companies that enjoy enduring success have core values and a core purpose that remain fixed, while their business strategies and practices endlessly adapt to a changing world.

Once you have chosen and defined your own values, have your team do the same. Where is there common ground? On what core values can you all agree that will become the light that guides you to achieving your practice vision?

Consider each of these common values: respect, trust, honesty, integrity. Most teams would consider these good values, and yet each person on the team may have a different way of defining that value. Does honesty mean the same to Person A as it does to Person B? Engaging your team in a conversation on how each person defines the value allows for a clear understanding of where each person is coming from.

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Remember, it is important to **suspend judgment** if someone defines a value differently than everyone else. Use this as a learning exercise instead – a different and new way of looking at things. In general, when someone agrees with what you hold true, you value it. On the other hand, when someone is not in agreement with what you hold true or correct, it's easy to become judgmental.

Also remember, values can change or shift depending on where someone is at a given point in time. Review yours and your team members' values on a regular basis, at least once a year.

2 THE RIGHT PEOPLE ON THE BUS

Do you have the right people on the bus? People who want to be on the same bus ride? Are you taking the uptown bus when the people on your bus want to go downtown? What kind of chaos is created when someone is on the wrong bus? Did you post the bus route clearly, before people got on the bus?

Imagine standing on a street corner and getting on the first bus that comes along, just because it's there! Then imagine staying on the bus, even though it may not be going in the right direction! Disruptions and complaints are inevitable, and no one is going to be happy with the direction the bus is going.

Are you, as the bus driver, happy with where your bus is going? When you get tired of driving the bus, do you hand the controls over to someone who can drive the bus for you and who knows the direction in which to head? When you're tired, do you move to sit behind the designated driver, or do you abdicate control completely? Do you abandon the bus? Jump off?

If you have the right people on the bus – people who are clear about where the bus is heading and clear about the route you are going to take – then you can take time off and let someone else steer the bus without worrying about its being hijacked!

So how do you find the right people for your bus? People with similar values, positive attitudes, and developed emotional intelligence skills? Once you've developed a list of potential candidates through ads, temp agencies, friends, colleagues, and existing employees, you'll use interviews, skill assessments, and reference/background checks. All of the above are the usual ways in which someone is invited to join the bus. Sometimes you're lucky, you hit a home run, and other times you just can't seem to get to first base!

This is where we come to the secret that great companies use to find the right people for their bus: **assessments**.

Assessments uncover the natural talents your potential bus rider will bring to the ride, show the level of emotional intelligence (known as EQ) an individual has developed, and demonstrate how that individual's EQ will help navigate the bus, not just when the ride is smooth but when it is bumpy too.

In their book, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, authors Dr. Travis Bradberry and Jean Gervais found that customer service-oriented jobs (like those in a dental practice) required the highest level of EQ, especially **empathy** and **service**.

3 RIGHT PEOPLE IN THE RIGHT SEATS ON THE BUS

Now comes the next, equally important step: making sure you not only have the right people, but you have them in the **right seats**! Do you use the natural talents and skills an individual possesses to match the skills the job requires? Do you have your people-oriented people in charge of the kind of interactions that demand good people skills? Do you have your people who are naturally talented at details, who are methodical, who are systematic do the things on your bus that require these strengths?

4 COMMUNICATING

If we are not able to communicate where the bus is heading, how can we expect others to follow?

In a landmark 1970 study on communication, UCLA's Albert Mehrabian found words convey only 7% of a verbal message! The other 93% is a combination of tone of voice (38%) and body language (55%). So why, in a dental office particularly, do we so often concentrate on verbal scripts only, when they convey such a small percentage of our intended message? Why not spend more time working on the message as a whole? For example: What is your tone of voice? Is it loud or soft? Fast or slow? Harsh or friendly? What is your body language saying? Are you angry or approachable? Are your arms shut across your chest, or open? Do you look someone in the eyes, or focus elsewhere? Are your shoulders hunched and rounded, or back and straight?

People are not mind readers, and thinking that others **should** know what you want, or what you are thinking, is unfair. Unless you hire through 1-800-Psychic, there's a good

chance no one on your bus knows exactly what you want or are thinking unless you make it a priority – and have the communication skills – to let them know.

Communicating your wants and requests in a manner that is positive, encouraging, clear, and with commitment is key to achieving your vision. How accessible are you to your partners on the bus? If they want to talk with you, do you make time for them, or do you find reasons why you just can't do it now, and then never get around to finding the time? How well do all of the people on your bus communicate? What coaching and support do you offer them to learn how to be more effective communicators?

Clinical skills are key, of course, but truly successful dentistry is based on being both an effective communicator and listener and in learning how to ask clarifying questions to make sure your message is being received as you intended.

5 PROBLEM SOLVING; RESOLVING CONFLICT

Problems happen! Things will go wrong. People will make mistakes. Systems will have flaws. You cannot avoid problems in your practice, but you can choose how to handle them when they arise. You can choose to waste your time focusing on what the problem is rather than what the solution is, or you can apply the 80/20 rule: spend 20% of your time identifying the problem and 80% on looking for the solution. Use the collective brain power of your team to help you problem solve, and then move on!

Problems and conflict go hand in hand – once one appears, the second is inevitable. And what do we tend to do? RUN! Run as if our lives depended on it. We attempt to avoid conflict at all costs, but by doing so we unknowingly accommodate actions, behaviors, and words that are often at odds with our core values.

When we ask dentists and team members why they chose dentistry as a profession, they often answer, "I enjoy helping people." What a wonderful reason to come to work every day! This basic concept is rooted in the fact that every human being has basic needs, which include being trusted, respected, and included. The last need is so powerful it leads us to avoid having any kind of conflict-based conversation. And yet by not having productive conflict resolution processes in place, conflict rarely, if ever, goes away, leaving a price to be paid. What if it's your patient who is paying the price? Or your referrals? What if it's production? Or collections? The list goes on: morale, attitudes, enthusiasm, motivation, reputation.

Embrace the opportunity to go from conflict to clarity.

Conflict is just another way of saying this: Someone's story is waiting to be told. As clinicians, we take courses in how to do a better prep, how to maximize our billing, how to schedule more efficiently, and a host of other courses that apply to the "hard" side of dentistry, yet we do not give ourselves or our team the tools needed to embrace and deal with conflict from a healthy perspective.

6 MOTIVATION

The most common myth is that employees are motivated by money – first, last, and above all else.

Studies prove this concept is untrue. Money is important, and it usually finds itself in the middle of the pack, but the most common factors people list are being appreciated, thanked, respected, and recognized for their contributions.

Do you know what motivates your team members, or do you make the common mistake of believing what motivates you will motivate them too?

The surefire way to learn what motivates others is to learn how to ask questions, and then listen – really listen – to the answers. Use those answers to ask more questions until you have truly discovered what it is that motivates the person you are speaking with. And remember, listen as much for what's NOT being said, as what is being said.

Learning about what motivates someone is easy once you commit to making it a priority.



7 TEAM BUILDING

you could just go to Home Depot and find the right parts, the right connectors, and a simple set of instructions that showed you how to put all the parts and pieces together? If only!

Great teams do not just happen. They are created by vision, by bringing shared values together, by finding each person's natural strengths, by understanding emotional intelligence, and by being committed to the belief that an ideal team is possible.

